DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 064 334 TM 001 499

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TITLE An Alternative to a Standardized Testing Program.
PUB DATE Apr 72
NOTE 3p.; Abstract of a symposium of the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, Illinois, April 1972)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Abstracts; City Wide Programs; *Symposia; *Test Construction; *Testing Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Madison; Wisconsin

ABSTRACT

This symposium discussed the problems school systems have with their testing programs, and presented as a model for discussion the approach used by the Madison (Wisconsin) Public Schools to redesign their system-wide testing program. The symposium looks at the traditional school district testing program and finds it dysfunctional and inadequate. An alternative structure is proposed and its implementation discussed. (DB)

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AN ALTERNATIVE TO A STANDARDIZED STANDARDIZED TESTING PROGRAM

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Symposium Abstract

The objective of this symposium is to discuss the problems school systems have with their testing programs, and to present as a model for discussion the approach that was used by the Madison (Wisconsin) Public Schools to redesign their system-wide testing program. Presentations will be made by those people who had responsibilities for the restructuring. They will present for discussion both their successes and their failures--what worked and what didn't work.

For many years the Madison Public Schools had operated a fairly traditional standardized testing program. While much data was produced annually it was apparent that there were problems. These included questions concerning (1) the relationship of the tests to the curriculum, (2) proper utilization of the data collected, and (3) ways and means of interpreting the results to parents and students. Because of these concerns, it seemed appropriate to re-evaluate the entire program.

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After some initial deliberation it was decided that total involvement by those who use the information from tests was crucial to building a meaningful testing program. In addition, it was decided that re-structuring a testing program was an extremely complex task.

In order to satisfy the first requirement, representatives from each of the 35 schools and the various professional staffs of the school system were solicited to work together in developing a total

testing program. Elementary, middle, and senior high school teachers, principals, psychologists, guidance counselors, and curriculum department members were formed into the Nucleus Committee for School Testing Specialists.

Recognizing that evaluation is a sophisticated task, leadership for the plan was obtained from Professor T. Anne Cleary of the University of Wisconsin. She structured the plan in such a way that the participants in the program would receive training in measurement as well as guidance in the development of the testing program for the Madison Public Schools.

Ms. Cleary, now Director of Examinations for the College Entrance Examination Board, will present a paper that will describe the background problems of Madison's standardized testing program, and develop the origin of the Nucleus Testing Committee. The paper was co-authored by Walter M. Mathews, who was the Coordinator of Research and Testing for the Madison Public Schools, and is titled: "The Nucleus Testing Committee."

The first task of the Nucleus Committee was to establish priorities for what should be measured. The Committee surveyed teachers, psychologists, counselors, social workers, and administrators of the school system to find what they needed to know about children in order to provide the best instructional program. Myron Seeman, the Coordinator of Health, Psychological, and Social Services for the Madison Public Schools, will present a description of the survey and the results that were collected from the different response-groups. His presentation is titled: "The Testing Needs-Assessment."

Three types of testing needs emerged from the survey: affective, curriculum-related (or criterion-referenced), and standard-

ized norm-referenced. Sub-committees of the Nucleus Testing committee were established to investigate each area and to develop specific recommendations on both a short-term and a long-term basis. A discussion of the activities of these three sub-committees and a summary of their recommendations and progress in reference to their recommendations will be presented by the person who coordinated each sub-committee. Aileen Nettleton, a reading consultant for the Madison Public Schools, will present the paper: "Recommendations: Standardized Testing." Peter Christiansen, the Coordinator of Mathematics for the school system, will present a paper titled: "Recommendations: Curriculum-Related Testing." Lee Hansen, the Coordinator of Research and Testing, will present the paper: "Recommendations: The Affective Domain."

The administrative problems inherent in a system-wide testing program will be discussed by Carmelo V. Sapone, the Director of Curriculum Development for the Madison Public Schools. He will also talk about the difficulties involved in the elimination of an existing testing program and the institution of the Nucleus Testing Committee. The title of his presentation is "The Administrative View."

The importance of this symposium is that it takes a long hard look at the traditional school district testing program, and finds it not only inadequate, but dysfunctional. An alternative structure is proposed, and the problems with, and the results from, the implementation of this new structure are presented for discussion.